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AUTHOR Arnold, Bill R.
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ABSTRACT

Human service program directors were surveyed to identify difficulties of bachelor's level mental health/human service programs that coexist with an accredited bachelor's level social work program. Of 12 universities where the programs coexist, a sample of 7 was investigated, using current college bulletins of the respective programs. Data were also obtained from a structured telephone interview with each human service program director or a designate for the director. In most instances, the human service degree has a psychological orientation in the curriculum (i.e., counseling/therapy skills, psychopathology, and developmental psychology). Three respondents viewed their universities' social work programs as dealing with casework methods, general problem solving, and in some instances, community organization. Another primary area of differentiation was the professional affiliation of the faculties of the two disciplines. The human services programs also had substantially more required practicum hours than the social work programs. When the human service programs were first established, some social work programs claimed duplication, and some local social work professional associations expressed opposition to the human services programs. All respondents reported no current conflicts between the field placements of human service and social work students. Advantages included a greater choice of degree area for students; a primary disadvantage was related to incoming students' confusion regarding the distinctions between human services and social work. The more acceptance and support that were provided by upper level administrators, the greater the cooperation in solving common difficulties of the two departments. (SW)

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Distinctions and Difficulties of Bachelor's Degree
Human Service Programs Where They Coexist
With Accredited Social Work Programs:
An Initial Exploratory Study¹

Bill R. Arnold, Ph.D.

Director, Human Service Program

Associate Professor, Behavioral Sciences

Pan American University

Edinburg, TX 78539

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¹ This exploratory study was conducted at the request of the Behavioral Sciences Department and the School of Social Sciences at Pan American University, where CSHSE-Approved Human Services and CSWE-Accredited Social Work Programs coexist.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify distinctions and difficulties of Human Services Programs where they coexist at the same university with accredited Social Work Programs. Twelve universities were identified where the programs coexist, and a sample of seven was selected for the investigation, using current university bulletins of respective programs. Data were obtained from a structured telephone interview with the Human Service Program Director or his/her designate. Results suggested a number of common concerns and difficulties, as well as potentially productive approaches to dealing with the identified problems.

With predictions of declining enrollment and increased competition for students, universities are beginning to look closely at all academic programs, and particularly those with similar curricula. As an emerging profession, mental health/human service programs have been involved in the process of justifying their curricula at a number of universities. This is particularly true for universities where accredited social work programs also exist.

With this in mind, the current survey sought to identify and describe common difficulties, as well as established identities for bachelor's level mental health/human service programs, as perceived by Human Service Program directors, where they coexist with an accredited bachelor's level social work program. Of particular interest, where the methods utilized by Human Services Programs to resolve the difficulties, and establish a university identity.

Method

A comparison of the directory of degree programs in mental health and human services (1978, Southern Regional Education Board) with those listed in a similar directory from the Council on Social Work Education (1980) yielded a total of 12 universities offering a bachelor's degree in human services and social work. Criteria for inclusion as a bachelor's degree mental health/human service program were delineated by Dr. Harold McPheeters, of the Southern Regional Education Board, in the preface to the Director (1978):

1. The program should be oriented to preparing practitioners for mental health or human service work

(including mental retardation and substance abuse.)

2. The faculty and orientation should be multidisciplinary rather than in an established discipline.
3. There should be identifiable field training.

Within this listing of twelve universities, review of respective university catalogs (n=7) yielded two major program categories within the mental health/human service area:

1. Those with a major field of mental health or human services, with at least one area of generalist training mental health-related, housed within a Human Service Program; and,
2. Those with a major field of community service, social science or psychology, with the training either generalist or exclusively mental health-related, housed within a Mental Health, Social Science or Psychology Program.

An attached chart (Table 1) illustrates these program categories and characteristics.

With these categories in mind, a sample of six programs were selected for study, with a telephone survey used as a basis for data and conclusions on all programs. Programs were chosen for the sample on the basis of convenience and due to their apparent representativeness of the two major program categories previously identified, as judged following a catalog review by the author. Additionally, for the purpose of this initial study, data from Pan American University are included, yielding a total

sample of seven programs.

Results

A summarization of telephone survey information is presented below, subsequent to each of the five survey questions. In each instance, the respondent was the Human Service Program Director (n=6) or his/her designate (n=1).

1. What features differentiate the Human Service degree from the accredited Social Work degree?

In most instances, the respondent suggested a psychological orientation in the curriculum; that is, counseling/therapy skills, psychopathology and developmental psychology. By contrast, three respondents viewed their university's respective Social Work Program as "traditional" dealing with casework methods, general problem solving, and in some instances, community organization. These Bachelor of Social Work Programs were viewed as directed primarily toward government social service agencies and welfare issues, but trying to expand into other areas, including mental health.

Another primary area of differentiation was the professional affiliation of the faculties of the two disciplines. Human Service Program faculty tended to be interdisciplinary, with a definite slant of "core" faculty drawn from psychology and counseling, while Social Work Programs were viewed as exclusively taught by social workers.

An additional difference cited was that of practicum course experience. The Human Service Programs showed laboratory and agency practicum experiences integrated throughout their four year program, yielding a

substantially larger number of required practicum hours than the respective Social Work Program.

And finally, two of the respondents described their programs as functionally leading to an "applied bachelor's degree in psychology."

2. What difficulties, past or present, have existed between the Human Service degree program and the Social Work degree program?

Almost all programs reported initial social work opposition to their Human Service degree program when proposed and initially established. Programs which were developed in established departments, such as psychology appeared to elicit less, and in some instances, no opposition from Social Work. Opposition at times came more forcefully from local social work professional associations. Bachelor of Social Work programs claimed duplication in all areas, while local association's opposition seemed more related to questioning the competence of mental health/human service workers providing "advanced" services.

3. What conflicts exist with regard to field placement?

All of the respondents reported no current conflicts between the field placements of Human Service and Social Work students. Both Human Service and Social Work students were currently housed at the same agencies, with one exception. It was reported that duplicate placement of Social Work students in several of these agencies occurred after the establishment of the agency as a practicum site by the Human Service Program. Social Work students had been primarily placed in government social service and welfare-related placements prior to the initiation of the Human Service Program.

At the one university where initial agency resistance was reported, it reportedly came from an organized local association of social workers, also employed at practicum agencies, who initially resisted supervising human service students. A concerted campaign by the Human Service Program Director, a Master of Social Work and former Social Work faculty, articulated the skill level and differences between the programs, and this reportedly has lessened the resistance.

4. How have these difficulties been successfully resolved, or have they been?

Respondents varied with regard to their answers to this question. At one university where interprogram conflict has been extremely intense, an executive directive supporting the development and recent establishment of the Human Service bachelor's degree has reportedly suppressed further overt conflict. This resolution process appears to have run a course somewhat similar to that found at one other university. Recently, at this second university, the two programs, previously under different administrative units, have been placed under the same department head. The facilitation of communication between the two programs, such that problem solving may be facilitated, appears to be the intent.

At another university, a university-wide requirement of pre-review of proposed courses by programs offering similar courses provided for increased communication between the two disciplines. This Human Service Program Director reported no opposition to Human Service courses subsequently proposed to their University Curriculum Committee. With a somewhat different problem of apparently organized resistance, executive-

level administrators at one university, both reportedly social workers, successfully intervened to short-circuit opposition. These two academic programs, to a degree, now reportedly interact more cooperatively.

5. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of having both programs at one university?

Advantages which were listed included a number of issues. Most frequently, respondents suggested that Human Service degrees gave students a choice of degree, allowing them the opportunity to select a "nontraditional" approach to their education. Along this line, courses in the Human Service Program were cited as used by some students as a double major (HS/SW; Psy/HS), and as a minor field for students in psychology seeking a terminal degree which provides job skills. Additionally, the indepth practicum experience was viewed as providing students with a higher skill level than attained by graduates of other programs. And finally, the flexibility and variety afforded Human Service Programs with regard to curriculum content and faculty was viewed as a real asset.

A primary disadvantage communicated by most respondents was related to incoming students' confusion regarding the distinctions between Human Services and Social Work. University faculty in other disciplines also lacked a clear understanding of the distinctions, in some instances. Both were viewed as problems perpetuated by the still developing identity of the professional mental health/human service worker. However, various program directors indicated educational efforts directed at both students and faculty that have helped provide a clearer perspective at their universities.

A final disadvantage was the reported friction generated by faculty of both programs feeling "threatened" and distrustful, which created an atmosphere that strained development of a mutually beneficial working relationship. These feelings seemed reported most frequently at those universities where one program was viewed as more powerful than the other, and where declining program enrollments have stiffened competition for majors.

Discussion

While there is no doubt that these survey results reflect the selective perceptions of both the interviewees and the current author, several common themes may be worth examining.

The first of these themes may seem obvious, but it appears extremely important. It relates to support systems external to the Human Service Program. Within the university, the more acceptance and support provided by upper level administrators, the more willing both degree programs appear to seek constructive solutions to common difficulties. Advocacy and education appear to be key tasks for human service leaders and educators within the governance structure of the university. To a lesser extent, but not to be minimized, seems to be the importance of establishing a strong support system with the community. Developing this support involves the establishment of an active community advisory committee, but it also involves more. In many instances, agency employers seem less interested in professional identity than in functional abilities and skills of students and graduates. Obtaining community support and acceptance ultimately rests on the human service educator's skills in

effectively screening, teaching, motivating, and supervising students. High quality program graduates showcase the professional human service identity in the community and engender support through their effectiveness.

Another theme focuses on the internal structure of both Human Service and Social Work Programs, and their relationship to one another. Increased cooperation can provide constructive solutions to most difficulties encountered. Recruitment of faculty, and particularly program leaders, who view "problems" as opportunities for creative, mutually beneficial solutions seems to be a logical step. Compromise may be possible in difficult areas, particularly if compromise reflects both student and community needs as primary.

Each university where both programs exist appears to have fostered the development of a unique identity for its human service program. In many instances, though interdisciplinary, the emphasis did seem to focus on applied aspects of psychology on an undergraduate level.

All in all, the difficulties encountered by these Human Service Programs seem to have more common elements than differences. Perhaps the most important and heartening conclusion is that both Social Work and Human Service Programs can and do seem to cooperatively coexist at some universities.

Conclusion

Before closing, limitations of the present study need to be clearly identified and suggestions for further study offered. Though the biased sampling process, the small sample size, and structured

interview approach adequately meet the needs of an initial exploratory approach to identify key issues, generalization of current results to all such programs can only occur after a more rigorous research approach is applied. Additional depth might also be obtained through inclusion of a comparative analysis of respective Social Work Program Director's perceptions. Additionally, as many psychology programs are establishing internships in applied and community psychology, an additional source of potential conflict for Human Services Programs may be developing. As such, an examination of the similarities and distinctions of these psychology programs and human services programs might prove beneficial as a step toward precluding potential conflicts.

Table 1

Human Service Program Characteristics

<u>University</u>	<u>Program Title</u>	<u>Degree(s)</u>	<u>Baccalaureate Major Field</u>
Northern Kentucky	Human Services	Bachelor of Science, Mental Health	Human Services
Morgan State	Mental Health	Bachelor of Science	Mental Health
Southern Illinois	Human Services	Bachelor of Science	Human Services
North Carolina A&T	Community Men- tal Health	Bachelor of Science Mental Health Assoc.	Community Psychology
Pennsylvania State	Social Science	Bachelor of Social Science	Social Sciences
Virginia Commonwealth	Behavior Tech- nology	Bachelor of Science	Psychology
Benidji University	Community Ser- vice	Bachelor of Science	Community Service

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